

Recommendations for Energy-Efficient Home Improvements in Florida

When making improvements to your home or when repairing hurricane damage, remember to improve the energy efficiency at the same time. Not only will your efforts increase the comfort of your home, but it will also lower your energy bills and help the environment.

Here are recommendations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, through the ENERGY STAR Program, along with ideas from the Florida Energy Extension Service, the Florida Solar Energy Center, the Florida Energy Office, and the Florida Energy Conservation Assistance Program to help you improve your home.

Seal and Insulate your Attic with ENERGY STAR Home Sealing

To learn more, go to www.energystar.gov/homesealing and download the Home Sealing Do-It-Yourself Guide.

- Seal air leaks that lead into the attic to keep the cool, conditioned air in the house and get the full performance from attic insulation.
- After air sealing, add insulation (cellulose or fiberglass) in the attic. You probably should add more if the level is below the height of the attic floor joist. If insulation is soaking wet or badly damaged, replace it. A minimum level of R-30 is recommended for most homes.
- Add reflective radiant barrier insulation in your attic stapled between the rafter joists to help cool down the attic space.
- Check to be sure soffit, gable, and/or ridge attic vents are not blocked with insulation to allow airflow to naturally cool your attic space. A well-vented attic using natural airflow extends shingle life and improves roof durability by allowing moisture to evaporate without using any additional energy.

Repair or replace damaged ducts

- Repair disconnects, tears, or punctures in the ducts with metal-backed tape or duct mastic. Replace if heavily damaged.
- Tape or mastic all duct joints to reduce any leaks (use metal-backed tape or duct mastic).
- Straighten ducts and remove any sharp bends to ensure good air flow.
- Be sure ducts are well insulated (R-6 to 8) against the hot attic air.
- Be sure the vent ducts are free of debris and exhaust outside of the house, not just into the attic.

Exterior recommendations

- In hot, sunny Florida climates use light-colored shingles (light gray or white). Metal roofs should also be light or white colored.

- When replacing windows, purchase ENERGY STAR qualified windows for the Florida climate. ENERGY STAR qualified windows for the Florida climate have built in low-e coatings that lower air conditioning costs by blocking heat from the sun and reduce UV rays that damage rugs and furniture.

ENERGY STAR qualified product recommendations

ENERGY STAR qualified products use less energy, save money, and help to save the environment. ENERGY STAR is the government-backed symbol for energy efficiency.



- Remodel with ENERGY STAR qualified compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and fixtures. CFLs last longer, reduce energy use and generate less heat than incandescent bulbs, which helps keep your house cool. Install switch plate style occupancy sensors on light switches so lights turn off when you're not in the room. If adding or replacing recessed light cans, use ICATs (insulation contact – air tight).
- Install a digital, programmable ENERGY STAR qualified thermostat to automatically turn the A/C to a higher temperature when you are not home or asleep.
- Remodel your kitchen and laundry room with ENERGY STAR qualified refrigerators, dishwashers, and clothes washers. Read the EnergyGuide label and look for the ENERGY STAR logo.
- Replace your air conditioning unit with a properly sized ENERGY STAR qualified model. Variable speed indoor fan units are recommended. Ask for a NATE Certified technician to repair or install the unit. If possible, install central A/C indoor unit in garage or indoors and avoid installing new A/C units in the attic.
- Seal gaps and holes around your entire house. Sealing areas such as ceilings, floors, basements, attics, exterior walls, and around doors and windows to keep the cool air in during the summer and the cold air out in the winter. Check out the ENERGY STAR Home Sealing Do-it-yourself Guidelines at www.energystar.gov/homesealing for more info.

- Replace ceiling fans with ENERGY STAR qualified models. Ceiling fans with wall switches (rather than chain operated controls) are recommended to promote turning fans off when leaving the room. Use large blade fans for large rooms.
- Install ENERGY STAR qualified day-lighting systems (light pipes, skylights) in dark living areas to reduce daytime electric lighting loads.

Additional Product Tips

- Central Air Conditioner Use
 - Run your A/C in auto mode so that the air handler fan only runs when the unit is on. Leaving it set to "on" mode will cause high energy bills and humidity.
 - Have a routine service checkup for the air-conditioning unit in the spring before the hot season starts. Have them clean the evaporator and condenser coils, check the refrigerant level, clean and adjust the blower components for good airflow, check and clean the condenser drain, lubricate moving parts, change the air filter, and check the thermostat and electrical connections.
- Water heaters
 - Purchase an energy efficient water heater.
 - Properly size the unit for your home use.
 - Insulate the first 6 feet of hot water pipe and unit.
 - Install a timer on unit.
 - A modest sized solar water heating system will provide 50-70% of an average household's hot water needs at low cost. Consider systems with collectors of 40 ft² or less. A 24 ft² system for a household of two or three may be ideal.
- Paint exterior surfaces (walls) with light colors to help lower air conditioning costs.
- Shade
 - Shade windows with porches, awnings, solar screens, shutters, or trellises.
 - Shade outdoor A/C units.
 - Trees can be very effective at shading and increase home value as they grow.
- Pools
 - Install solar powered pool and irrigation pumps.

- Alternatively, consider solar assisted geothermal heat pumps for air-conditioning and pool heating.

Additional Resources

- Contact your local utility company for a home energy audit (many audits are free or low-cost) – you may even want to ask the utility company to include performance testing.
- Ask you Home Depot sales associate for more information on ENERGY STAR qualified products and ENERGY STAR recommended home sealing products.
- Contact local lenders to see if they will finance any energy improvement with an energy efficient mortgage (EEM).

CONTRIBUTORS

Florida Energy Extension Service, Florida Solar Energy Center, Florida Energy Office, Florida Energy Conservation Assistance Program, U.S. Department of Energy, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
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